

# DENVER TO GLASGOW:

## Learning Through Experience



*by Nick Bratvold, Vice President-Philanthropy,  
Educational Foundation*

Last year marked the 300th birthday of Scottish pioneer Adam Smith, widely regarded as the “father of economics.” Throughout 2023, Smith’s alma mater—the University of Glasgow—celebrated his life and career through exhibitions, lectures, and published work.

As part of the tercentenary celebration, the Adam Smith School of Business hosted an economic case competition, inviting students to propose innovative solutions to the global climate crisis. The competition would bring together students from across the world to share and defend their proposals. Among those invited was Chaz Contag, a Lambda Chi Alpha Member from the University of Denver.

Not yet into his sophomore year, Contag was one of the only non-MBA students to be selected to compete. Still, he lacked the funds to make the hop across the pond and requested support from his Chapter’s scholarship committee, chaired by long-time Chapter advisor and former chair of the Grand High Zeta, Drew Hunter (Denver ’84).





“When Chaz approached me about his opportunity to participate in an international economic competition, I was immediately intrigued,” reMembers Hunter. “This is exactly what our endowment is meant to do and, after interviewing Chaz, I was instantly sold by his enthusiasm and drive to succeed. My only caveat was that he shared his experience upon his return.”

With Hunter’s encouragement and scholarship support from his Chapter’s endowment, Contag had all he needed to fly to Glasgow.

“The most challenging aspect of the conference was preparing a presentation with people I didn’t have the opportunity to practice with,” reflected Contag. “The first time we were all together was the morning of the presentation!”

For their part in the competition, Contag and his team presented a cap-and-trade model where carbon credits follow the market price. In this model, companies with carbon neutrality are rewarded while those who are high emitting are penalized. His teammates discussed the economic implications as Contag largely focused on the environmental impact of this model.

The experience was deeply memorable and impactful, reMembers Contag.

“We heard distinguished individuals debate the topics we researched,” said Contag. “It was surreal to meet a member of parliament and discuss The Future of the Commons, which I had read just months prior.”

After four days together, it was validating—but also shocking—for Contag and his teammates to learn they had placed second overall.

“We were all excited to place second, especially given the circumstances of our tight travel and preparation window,” said Contag. “There was a celebration after with a traditional Scottish Ceilidh dance and champagne.”

With the competition behind him, Contag’s journey through Scotland continued northwest to Fort William to climb Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the UK. Despite the rain and gusting winds, he hiked Coire Leis and camped in Charles Inglis Hut. Before his train ride back, Contag even had the opportunity to cool off in a small glacial lake.

Hardly halfway through his undergraduate career, Contag is already an avid supporter of studying abroad.

“It provides an opportunity to immerse yourself in the environment,” shared Contag. “The depth gained by surrounding and immersing yourself in new cultures is unrivaled.”



Glasgow marked Contag’s second trip aboard. The winter prior, Contag spent two weeks in South Africa, between Cape Town, Cape Horn, Stellenbosch, Johannesburg, and other locations.

“In South Africa, we examined the implications of Apartheid, and saw where the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet,” recalled Contag. “We explored beautiful wineries and learned about water access and purification. We discussed the implications of the diamond industry and the ethics of the game reserves and wildlife economy. It was truly a trip of a lifetime.”

During his time in South Africa, Contag also researched and presented on the restoration of the fynbos biome, an ecosystem unique to South Africa endangered by urban sprawl and development. Here, Contag investigated the economic services provided by the system, including clean air and water, fertile soil for crop production, pollination, and flood control—a value of more than \$43 million to the local ecosystem.

Already, Contag has found commonalities between his experiences abroad and within Lambda Chi Alpha.

“Experiential learning is my favorite way to learn, and being in new areas while doing that learning is an amazing opportunity,” said Contag. “It’s very similar to Lambda Chi, where I’m also surrounded by a community of people who push me to be academically successful, socially connected, and philanthropically generous.”

Upon returning to Denver, Contag was nominated to serve as High Iota (Risk Manager), deepening his responsibilities within his Chapter and relationships with his institution. Contag plans to graduate in the spring of 2026, majoring in environment science and international studies, with minors in sustainability and Spanish. Meanwhile, he continues to work for a Denver-based law firm as a legal research analyst, furthering his dreams of attending law school after graduation.

The Denver University (Alpha-Pi Zeta) Endowment was created in 1985 by recent graduates and Alumni as an independent foundation, providing need-based and leadership-oriented scholarships to deserving undergraduates. In 2016, the fund was transferred to the Lambda Chi Alpha Educational Foundation to ensure its longevity and has, since that time, awarded more than \$50,000 in merit- and needs-based scholarships. This fund is one of more than 80 endowments held by the Educational Foundation that benefits undergraduate Lambda Chi Alpha Members.